

Memorandum

To: Chairman and Commissioners

Date: February 16, 1999

From: Robert I. Remen

File No: K38.7
BOOK ITEM 2.5c (3)
ACTION

Ref: COAL CANYON ENVIRONMENTAL ENHANCEMENT AND MITIGATION PROJECT

Issue: Should the California Transportation Commission allocate \$1 million to the California Department of Parks and Recreation to acquire approximately 23 acres north of Route 91 near the Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino County lines, for the Coal Canyon 1998-99 Environmental Enhancement and Mitigation (EEM) project?

Recommendation: Commission staff has reviewed the proposed funding package for the EEM project and the overall project that is intended to create the habitat linkage between the Santa Ana Mountains and the Puente-Chino Hills. Given the level of funding currently in hand and the Department of Parks and Recreation's expectation of additional funding, Commission staff recommends that the Commission allocate the \$1 million for the EEM Coal Canyon project.

Background: When the Commission adopted the 1998-99 Environmental Enhancement and Mitigation Program last August in San Diego, the Commission expressed concern that the Coal Canyon project was but a small part of a much larger overall project to acquire lands adjacent to, and on both sides of, Route 91. The overall project and the EEM project have the objective of protecting the last viable habitat linkage between the Santa Ana Mountains and the Puente-Chino Hills. The overall project will require substantial amounts of funding beyond that which is required for the proposed EEM project. In order to avoid committing scarce EEM funds for a small part of a much larger overall project that might not get funded and completed in a timely manner, the Commission's resolution adopting the EEM program contained language requiring the Department of Parks and Recreation to demonstrate that full funding for the project has been committed before the EEM funds would be allocated and encumbered.

In December, the Commission took a major step toward completing the funding package for the overall project by committing an additional \$6 million to the project from the Conservation Lands Program, which is part of the federally funded Transportation Enhancement Activities (TEA) Program. This \$6 million will be used to acquire up to 220 acres south of route 91 and will require a \$780,000 match from sources other than the TEA or EEM program.

The Department of Parks and Recreation has committed additional funds that, when combined with the EEM funds, will complete the portion of the overall project that lies north of Route 91. The Department has also assured Commission staff that it has a commitment from a major land conservancy for up to \$2.5 million to be used on the south side of Route 91 along with the total of \$6,780,000 in TEA/match funding. While the funds currently in hand (\$9,280,000) do not appear to be sufficient to acquire all the land that the Department would like to purchase south of Route 91 (Commission staff estimates total cost to be \$15 to \$20 million), the funding in hand does appear to be enough to complete a viable habitat linkage. The Department is also confident that additional funding for the overall project will be forthcoming.

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